



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council

STAFF

Bernadette Kuhn, Natural Areas Senior Environmental Planner/Restoration Project Manager
Matt Parker, Natural Areas Senior Supervisor Resource Management
Julia Feder, Natural Areas Environmental Program Manager
Ingrid Decker, Legal

SUBJECT

Resolution 2022-081 Authorizing the City Manager to Execute an Intergovernmental Agreement with Larimer County for the Northern Big Game Critical Winter Range Restoration Project at Coyote Ridge and Bobcat Ridge Natural Areas.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to adopt a resolution supporting the RESTORE Big Game Critical Winter Range Habitat project and the City and Larimer County's related intergovernmental agreement. The Larimer County Department of Natural Resources was recently awarded \$328,900 by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation RESTORE Program. Larimer County is the prime recipient, together with subrecipients Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW), City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department (FCNAD), Boulder County Parks & Open Space, and Jefferson County Open Space.

Funds from the award will be used to control and eradicate invasive annual grasses across 4,385 acres of Northern Colorado foothills open spaces to improve critical winter habitat for elk and mule deer. As a partnering agency, FCNAD will receive \$58,500 to treat 780 acres across Coyote Ridge and Bobcat Ridge Natural Areas. To share the funding, Larimer County has requested that the City of Fort Collins enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA), a draft of which is attached to the Resolution as Exhibit "A".

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends adoption of the Resolution.

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

The Big Game Critical Winter Habitat Range Project will focus on treating cheatgrass (*Bromus spp.*) and feral rye (*Secale cereale*), two annual invasive grasses that outcompete native vegetation food sources for elk and mule deer and create fine fuel loads that increase wildfire risk. These grasses have invaded the native shrublands, grasslands, and ponderosa pine forests at Coyote Ridge and Bobcat Ridge natural areas that serve as important wildlife migration corridors and critical winter range habitat for elk and mule deer.

In 2016, FCNAD successfully treated 2,352 acres for annual invasive grasses via aerial application. Early treatments used the herbicide imazapic, an herbicide capable of suppressing cheatgrass for one to two

years. In the last few years, NA has used a newer herbicide called indaziflam that was more promising as it has been shown to suppress cheatgrass for three or more years with a single application. The herbicide prevents the annual invasive grass seeds from germination. The results of indaziflam treatments have been dramatic, with native forbs, shrubs, and grasses increasing cover and richness within a year of treatment. All five agency partners have seen major habitat improvements treating open spaces with indaziflam. Extensive research conducted by Colorado State University has demonstrated its effectiveness for long-term control of annual invasive grasses and limited injury to native, perennial plants (Sebastian et al. 2017).

Through this award, FCNAD will treat 230 acres at Coyote Ridge and 550 acres at Bobcat Ridge Natural Areas in addition to the 250 acres already planned for treatment. **(Attachment 3)** Due to difficult terrain in open spaces and for improved cost-effectiveness, the herbicide indaziflam will be applied by helicopter over a two-year period, beginning in fall 2022. The treatments will be monitored before and after application using on-the-ground traditional monitoring methods and a new Geographic Information System (GIS) tool called Rangeview™, which uses remote sensing to detect the levels of cheatgrass on a map.

CITY FINANCIAL IMPACTS

FCNAD will receive \$58,500 to treat cheatgrass across 780 acres at Bobcat Ridge and Coyote Ridge. FCNAD is contributing \$22,875 in cash match and \$9,562 in-kind match (staff time).

BOARD / COMMISSION / COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

FCNAD staff are requesting a recommendation from Land Conservation and Stewardship Board in support of the IGA at its August 10 meeting.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

FCNAD follow a process for public notification prior to aerial herbicide treatments. **(Attachment 4)** One or two weeks ahead of the treatment, signs are posted at the Natural Area entrance, and a notice is released on social media and COTREX. Signs and posts are updated the day before the treatment closure. On treatment day, staff members are posted at the Natural Area entrance to answer questions and ensure visitors do not enter site. The site is closed to visitors during the treatment. Typical closure times last one day to allow herbicide to dry.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution for Consideration
2. Resolution Exhibit A
3. RESTORE Proposal to National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
4. Aerial Herbicide Application Checklist